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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General says that unless negotiated settlement is reached between Croats and local Serbs in 'pink zones', "sound basis would not exist" for renewal of UNPROFOR's mandate in Croatia; recommends extension of existing mandate until 31 March to allow for current peace efforts.

+ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees condemns Bosnian Serb policy of denying humanitarian convoys access to besieged enclaves of eastern Bosnia.

+ Secretary-General's Special Representative for Cambodia briefs President of France on Cambodian situation and challenges facing UNTAC.

+ Austria's Minister for Women's Affairs, in statement to Human Rights Commission in Geneva, says rape is being used as weapon of war in former Yugoslavia.

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With ten days left before the current mandate of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) expires, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has concluded that unless a negotiated settlement is reached between the Croatian Government and the Serb population in the so-called "pink zones", a "sound basis would not exist" for renewing UNPROFOR's mandate in Croatia.

That assessment is contained in a report by the Secretary-General to the Security Council, dated 10 February, in which he outlines the options for UNPROFOR's future mandate in the United Nations Protected Areas and the "pink zones" -- areas of tension between Croatian forces and local Serb militias.

In his report, the Secretary-General calls for "urgent efforts", at every senior level, to resolve the problems arising from the recent Croatian offensive in the region. He recalls that the primary reason for UNPROFOR's deployment in that country by the Security Council a year ago, was to create the conditions under which a political settlement could be negotiated. However, he says, the Croatian Government and the local Serb authorities are at present "a long way" from meeting the Security Council's demands under

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resolution 802 (1993) for Croatian withdrawal to previous positions and an end to hostilities.

Warning that the situation could lead to large-scale hostilities if UNPROFOR is withdrawn from the region, the Secretary-General reports that he has asked the Co-Chairmen of the Steering Committee of the International Conference on former Yugoslavia, Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, to pursue a solution urgently and to make recommendations concerning UNPROFOR's mandate. In order to give the Co-Chairmen the necessary time to pursue their efforts, the Secretary-General has recommended to the Security Council that it extend the existing mandate for an interim period up to 31 March.

In a related development, Croatia has accused the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) of conducting war actions aimed at eliminating the remaining members of the Croatian population in United Nations Protected Areas, Sector South and surrounding areas of the country.

In a letter to the Secretary-General, dated 8 February, the Prime Minister of Croatia, Hrvoje Sarinic, said the territory of Croatia, formally under the protection of UNPROFOR, was "a scene of terror and genocide as all the remaining Croats are held hostage by the foreign irregular units".

He went on to say that Yugoslavia, its volunteer phalanxes and paramilitary formations of the so-called "Knin authorities" had exterminated the traces of the last remnants of Croatian population in the country by expelling hundreds of persons and simultaneously destroying their homes and property. Up to now, nearly 3,000 people had been expelled and 500 killed in the territory under UNPROFOR protection, he said.
Documents S/25264 and S/25265

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata, has condemned the Bosnian Serb policy of denying humanitarian convoys access to the besieged enclaves of eastern Bosnia as a means of "starving people out of their homes".

According to a press release issued at Headquarters today, Mrs. Ogata had sent a letter to the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, Radovan Karadzic, in which she said the UNHCR had been pressing for weeks for clearance to deliver aid to the enclaves, where "more than a hundred thousand people are suffering untold hardship due to the military blockades".

Mrs. Ogata reminded Mr. Karadzic of his repeated assurances that humanitarian convoys would be guaranteed unhindered, safe passage. She pointed out that "victims do have a right to receive international assistance in their place of residence".

The High Commissioner has also asked Cyrus Vance, the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy to Yugoslavia, to give top priority to the issue of humanitarian assistance in the International Conference on the former

Yugoslavia and to ask the Bosnian Serbs for their immediate support for the delivery of assistance.

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The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Cambodia, Yasushi Akashi, met last night with President François Mitterrand of France, during the latter's one-day visit to Cambodia.

According to a spokesman for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), Mr. Akashi briefed President Mitterrand on the general situation in Cambodia and the challenges confronting UNTAC. Mr. Akashi thanked the French President for his country's contribution to UNTAC and said that the Paris Agreement was still valid, although UNTAC had to make some adaptations in light of the situation in the country.

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In the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, rape was being used as a weapon to wage war against women, Austria's Minister for Women's Affairs, Johanna Dohnal, has told the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. The assaults against the physical integrity and human dignity of women had become part of a cynical strategy of warfare, she said.

Addressing this morning's meeting, the Minister said women were raped not only in war but also in peacetime. It was the everyday violence against women in society which made men resort to the strategy of systematic rape in war. She called for intensified efforts to outlaw all violence against women. The rights of women should be made a priority at the World Conference on Human Rights scheduled to be held in Vienna in June.

The Commission also heard calls for the international community to act expeditiously to prevent the outbreak of war in Kosovo, and to help end the suffering of the civilian population, particularly the Muslim community of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Speakers also called for the criminalization of the abhorrent policies of systematic rape and "ethnic cleansing" as war crimes and the establishment of international judicial mechanisms to prosecute perpetrators of those crimes.

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